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# Soviets Test U.S., Allied Air Defenses

In the past several months, the Soviet Union has increased the number, range and daring of its worldwide aerial surveillance, including deliberate penetration of NATO and U.S. air space.

Aside from the reconnaissance value, the overflights have another obvious purpose: to test American and allied reaction as a gauge of our defensive capability.

I've already reported the sorry state of our air defense network, including significant radar gaps that would allow Soviet bombers to reach American targets undetected. Our military leaders know about these dangerous deficiencies; the Soviets obviously know, too. Only the public hasn't been told.

Fortunately, the Reagan administration at least recognizes the problem, and apparently intends to do something about the holes in our defensive umbrella.

Here is some additional information on the aerial cat-and-mouse game the Russians have been playing with increasing boldness:

- Intelligence sources told my associate Dale Van Atta that NATO air space is being penetrated on a regular basis. Pairs of MIG23s make lengthy flights along the borders of NATO countries, sometimes penetrating deep inside them.

- The most flagrant violation of NATO air space — and the most em-

barrassing demonstration of the Soviets' ability to penetrate NATO with impunity — occurred last April. A MIG25 Foxbat reconnaissance plane made an overflight of the entire Rhone Valley in the heart of France. "The French sent up Mirage 2000s, but they couldn't shoot it down," a Pentagon source said.

- The Air Force has acknowledged it scrambled fighter planes on 142 occasions between January and September last year to intercept Soviet military aircraft. They intruded into the U.S. Air Defense Identification Zone, which runs 200 miles out into the Atlantic. These were only the flights that were detected; no one likes to guess how many slipped in and out unnoticed. Sources suggest the uncaught penetrations over Florida alone could run literally into the thousands, judging from the continuing success of drug-smuggling flights from Latin America.

- On Sept. 18, and again six days later, Soviet Bear bomber missions were detected off the coast of Virginia.

- Early last year, a possible Bear bomber flight was tracked over the eastern United States as far north as Baltimore, almost in tandem with a possible MIG23 or MIG25 flight over northern Florida.

- Soviet Backfire bombers certainly overflew Alaska last year, and possibly made several unverified flights over the Lower 48.

It would not be unusual for the Pentagon to deny knowledge of Soviet penetrations. Top-secret CIA documents, going back a few years, reveal that "a U.S. Coast Guard aircraft on a search-and-rescue mission south of Florida was harassed by Cuban fighters. After intercepting the U.S. aircraft, about 40 nautical miles northwest of the Cuban coast, the fighters made numerous close passes . . . . The U.S. aircraft descended to a very low altitude and returned to Florida with the fighters following for some distance."

The National Security Agency reported that "two Cuban MIG fighter aircraft entered the U.S. Air Defense Identification Zone" two weeks later. One came "within 45 miles of the Florida coast."

A Pentagon source cut through the public relations rhetoric and offered a stark, frightening translation: on our southern flank, he said, the nation's air defense "has practically nothing."